CAMERAWORK

Laurence Migdale — *'Circus Travelling' – July Half Moon Exhibition*

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Art, Common Sense and Photography

BY VICTOR BURGIN

The main thrust of photographic criticism these days is towards the consideration of photography as Art. CAMERAWORK, on the other hand, has raised the issue of photography as an instrument of ideology. Many people believe that these two approaches are incompatible. Art is thought to have nothing to do with politics, 'political' art is thought to be irretrievably compromised as Art. But the two may not be quite as mutually exclusive as these people like to think.

Work with an obvious ideological slant is often condemned as 'manipulative'; that is to say, first, that the photographer manipulates what comes over in the image; second, that as a result his or her audiences beliefs about the world are manipulated. Not much is known about how the media influence opinions, although we can be fairly sure that people aren't simply led by the nose by photographs. Whatever the case, both charges can be similarly answered: manipulation is of the essence of photography; *photography would not exist without it.*

In photography, certain physical materials are technically handled so that meanings are produced. Photographers are people who manipulate the physical means of production of photography; cameras, film, lighting, objects, people. Using the productive capabilities of photography to reproduce the world as an object of aesthetic contemplation, and nothing else, is no less 'manipulative' than is any other use of photograph: to turn away is an act, to turn away from situations of immediate social relevance is a political act, and to perform such acts in every working moment adds up to a political policy.

The only imaginable non-political being is a totally self-sufficient hermit. The photographer who has chosen to live in a society and enjoy its benefits, even though he also chooses to put on blinkers when he squints into a viewfinder, is willy-nilly an actor in a political situation. So how is it that so many people can genuinely believe that they lead a-political lives and that it is others – 'militants' and 'extremists' – who 'have' ideology, not themselves? We must first say what we mean by 'ideology.'

When we look at the day-to-day life of a distant culture – behaviour, customs, dress, diet – we are immediately struck by its strangeness: Why do they do that? Why do they eat those? What does it all mean? Few such questions trouble us as we pursue our own lives in our own culture, and if they were asked, they would probably get short shrift. Why does a man generally let a female stranger precede him when he is going into a shop, but not when he is boarding a bus? Why do men hang ties around their necks when they wear a shirt, but not when they wear a roll-neck jumper? The questions appear silly, the answers obvious. . . . This is ideology as 'world-view,' a commonsense understanding of 'the way things are' which is unquestioningly 'taken for granted.'

What we do ourselves seems so natural to us that we even cease to *notice* what we do. 'Habitualisation,' said the critic Viktor Shklovsky "devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war." Through habitualisation, working men and women accept lives of tedium, or even misery, as their natural lot, while others accept the social cost of their own greed as being just as unavoidable. The media by which we are informed characteristically reinforce such attitudes: "Unemployment is expected to rise next month. . . . More rain is expected in the south-west" – both facts appear equally to belong to the natural order of things, acts of God against which there can be no insurance.

The sort of habitualisation which leads millions to collude in their own repression, and which allows the rich and privileged to continue to act selfishly "in all good faith" Marx called "false consciousness." For example, in order that the institutions of the State should continue to serve the interests of a ruling oligopoly, it is necessary that most people should continue to believe that such institutions serve everyone equally. Or again, the belief common to both those who own the means of production and those who do productive work that labour may

Fig. 1

fairly be bought for wages is a mystification which conceals the fact that, as the value of a commodity depends on the labour invested in it, the owner is appropriating as profit what belongs by right to the labourer: profits are unpaid wages. The idea of false-consciousness is another important aspect of the meaning of the term, 'ideology.'

The politically 'Left' photographer wants to help correct society's false picture of its actual conditions of existence, to raise such questions as: Why this practice? What does it mean? What interests does it serve? Such a photographer wants to help people become conscious of the forces which shape their day-to-day lives; to realise that the social order is not a *natural* order, and thus beyond all change, but is made by people and can be changed by them. The politically dissident photographer however is involved in an apparent paradox, that of seeking to penetrate appearances with an instrument designed specifically to record appearances and appearances alone.

Fig. 2

Bertold Brecht found the camera a politically-deficient instrument: a photograph of a factory, he pointed out, tells us nothing of the economic forces governing the lives of those who work in it. Roland Barthes made a similar point when he reviewed *The Family of Man* exhibition: of course babies are born and nursed by their mothers all around the world, but photographs of them tell us nothing of the child's life expectancy or of the likelihood that its mother might have died giving birth.

Such writers, notably including Walter Benjamin, have concluded that as language itself is the instrument best adapted to making a politically-specific statement, then the photograph can only serve the text. But, although the premise here is correct, the conclusion does not necessarily follow from it. In his essay on The Family of Man, Barthes condemns the failure of photography to make a political statement, yet in this same essay he condemns the exhibition precisely for making such a (mystificatory) political statement.

A photograph of a baby at the breast of a woman in a private nursing home in Switzerland may be placed alongside a photograph of a similarly-composed mother and child group in a village in rural India. Assuming that there are no obvious signs of deprivation on the one hand, or of privilege on the other, the two images together will pronounce: "Mothers and their babies are the same everywhere." Such a smugly reassuring message was indeed communicated by *The Family of Man* exhibition. The caption, the title of the exhibition, served mainly to underline what had already been said. In this case, the text served the photographs.

Here, an ideological content is produced by a formal device. The message: "The condition of motherhood is the same all over the world," would not have been conveyed so readily by either of the photographs alone. Only the juxtaposition of the two creates such a content, in such clarity, and with all the immediacy of an observed natural truth. (The message is ideological not simply because it is wrong in what it says – simply to be mistaken is not necessarily to be in a state of false-consciousness – it is ideological because it misrepresents the actual material condition of the world *in the service of specific vested interests.)*

Because we have separate words for 'form' and 'content', we are easily misled into believing that they stand for totally distinct areas of experience. But there is no content without a form, and no form which does not shape a content. In that they both have been misled by a picture of the world given to us by language, 'artists' and 'activists' alike tend to inhabit the same aesthetic ideology. Artists believe that they can present a totally content-free world of pure forms. Activists believe in the autonomous power of 'the truth' which will impose itself regardless of formal considerations. It will pay us, if we are concerned with what photographers 'say,' to examine the devices which *enable* photography to say things, devices so familiar to us they may pass unnoticed.

Popular photography magazines periodically carry articles advising their readers to look for 'contrast.' Such articles generally begin with a directive to look for contrasts of light and dark tones, rough and smooth textures. . . ., and then move from form-oriented to content-oriented oppositions such as young/old, happy/sad, etc. Such contrasts are indeed part of the stock-in-trade of the professional – take, for example, the picture of 'victory and defeat' in Fig. 1.

Most active photographers are aware of the phenomenon the 'third effect': two images side-by-side tend to generate meanings not produced by either image on its own. This effect may be produced by bringing together two physically-distinct prints (from two separate negatives), or by juxtaposing two distinct elements within a single frame. In the latter case, the juxtaposition may be brought about by chance (happy coincidence) or by design; if by design, then either 'natural' means (casting, posing, etc.) or 'technical' means (darkroom manipulation, collage, etc.) may be used.

For example, take the picture of George V on Derby Day in Fig. 2: in this image, we believe that the contrast of rich and poor is made on the basis of a coincidence – the photographer just happened to be there when. . . .; but it is equally possible, although perhaps less likely, that the two main elements of the image were assembled in the darkroom from separate negatives. Or, again, it is not beyond possibility that the situation depicted was 'set up' for the camera – for example, the photographer could have directed a suitably-cast and dressed person to run up to the coach at a predetermined spot. Further to all this, the contradiction of rich and poor could have been communicated by juxtaposing two separate photographs, taken at different times and places from one another.

Of the above possibilities, we would probably conclude that the picture we have here is in actuality the most effective. The photojournalistic 'snap' has an authority which other forms of picture-making lack; it presents itself as factual evidence of an actual state of affairs. In photojournalism, a particular moment may somehow come to signify a general truth. This 'somehow' is generally considered to be unaccountable except in terms of such things as 'luck,' 'talent' or a combination of the two. Certainly the photographer of George V was lucky, and he may very well have been 'talented' (whatever that means), but while the picture before us may have depended on luck for its existence, it does not depend upon luck or 'talent' for its meaning – its meaning is something we can account for.

All communication takes place on the basis of signs, most predominately on the basis of visible and audible signs. To say that one person has communicated with another is to say that each of them has understood how to use and interpret the signs which made up the message between them. If you speak to me in Greek, I have no problem hearing the noises you are making, but if I do not 'know Greek' in common with you, then I cannot understand what you are saying.

Fig. 3

The photograph is a sign, or more correctly speaking, a complex of signs, used to communicate a message. If you show me a photograph of a pile of stones then, at an immediate level, my eye receives visual 'noise' just as my ear received verbal noise when you spoke to me in Greek. We can suppose that I have seen photographs since I was a child and so have no problem interpreting these irregular patches of light and dark tones as representing stones. (When African bushmen were first shown photographs, they had to be taught to read them). But what beyond this? If I go on to remark that the photograph depicts a temple, that the temple is ruined, and that is Greek, then I am relying upon knowledge that is no longer 'natural', 'purely visual'; I am relying upon knowledge that is cultural, verbally transmitted, and in the final analysis, ideological (I might think 'cradle of civilisation' or 'damned Greeks' according to when and where I happened to be born).

Most photographers are aware of using some sort of system of effects in their work, but such systematisation as may be achieved is generally believed to concern only the purely formal – the 'visual.' Content, it is believed, is just *there* in the world, and therefore in the picture, whether lined up with the frame or composed on the diagonal. But once we reject the idea of photography as a 'purely visual' language, understood equally by everybody everywhere, then we may begin to consider the possibility that content, too, may be *produced* as deliberately as one may plan the formal composition of the photograph.

To return, then, to 'contrast.' All contrasts are juxtapositions, but not all juxtapositions are contrasts. The 'Derby Day' and 'Boxing' pictures are based upon a contrast; that is to say, a *dissimilarity* of contents (rich/poor, victory/defeat). The well-known Diane Arbus picture of identical twins, on the other hand, (Fig. 3) is based upon a *similarity* of both form and content. The fashion picture beside it (Fig. 4) is based upon a juxtaposition of similar forms which have dissimilar contents (e.g., animate/inanimate).

Looked at more closely, the photographer's stock-in-trade of 'contrast' may be seen to consist of a number of distinct communicative devices, devices which nevertheless seem to evolve upon the common basis of the various relationships into which two or

Art, Common Sense and Photography

Fig. 4

more visual elements may enter. The nub of such a system is formed by relationships of similarity and dissimilarity of form and of content, with additional manipulations in the form of substitutions and permutations of elements. The working out of such a system in its entirety is one of the tasks which might be undertaken within a 'semiotic' study of photography.

Semiotics, or semiology, is the science which studies signs. We recognise that some photographers are more successful communicators than others. The semiotician is interested in the reasons for their success or failure – not, of course, in terms of the photographer's personal history, but in terms of the photographic sign itself. The semiotician works from the assumption that wherever we recognise 'mastery' of an art, we also implicitly acknowledge the existence of some system which has been mastered – whether the 'master' is conciously aware of the system or not.

In the early days of 'structuralist' semiology (Roland Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* first appeared in France in 1964) exclusive attention was paid to the analogy between 'natural' language (the phenomenon of speech and writing) and visual 'language.' It had long been common for people to speak loosely of 'the language of . . .', this or that activity, including, of course, 'the language of photography,' but it was not until the 1960's that any systematic investigation of forms of communication outside of natural language was conducted from the standpoint of linguistic science.

There were two main reasons for approaching visual communication through linguistics: first, language is the most elaborate and comprehensive form of communication ever evolved, and it seemed at least a reasonable working hypothesis to assume that other forms of human communication might have evolved along basically similar lines; second, modern structural linguistics was itself a sufficiently-established science to provide the necessary ready-made theoretical models of communication to start the new science of semiology on its way.

One aspect of natural language use which was found to have a particular bearing on the topic of visual communicative devices is rhetoric. Simply speaking, rhetoric is the artful use of language in order to persuade. In rhetoric, language draws attention to itself in order to attract and retain the attention of the listener or reader – form is manipulated to engage interest in the contents.

Rhetoric first evolved in the Classical period, and one of the difficulties in studying rhetoric today is that the ancient terms are still in use to label its 'figures': terms such as *antanaclasis*, *chiasmus*, *synechdoche*, . . ., etc. However, the meaning of most of these terms becomes clear once examples are provided: In *antanaclasis*, a single word is repeated with different senses, e.g., "Learn a craft in your youth so that in your old age you can earn your living without craft"; in *chiasmus*, words are repeated but inverted in their order in the course of a single sentence, e.g., "You should eat to live, not live to eat"; in *synecdoche*, a word is used in a sense of which its usual sense is only a part, e.g., "Give me your heart" (when the entire body is being sought).

Advertising is the most obvious place we might expect to find rhetorical figures (of which there are literally hundreds). In the first place, there is no doubt that someone is setting out deliberately to persuade, in the second place, there is little doubt that everything in the advertisement has been most carefully placed for maximum effect. Commercial publicity, obviously, endorses and perpetuates the commodity values central to our capitalist ideology. On the left, the prevailing view of advertising tends to be simply one of disapproval. From one point of view in 'classic' semiology, however, the *structure* of advertising may be disengaged from its contents: the rhetorical structures of advertising are 'indifferent' to the emotional and ideological value of the contents they handle; much as, for example, an arithmetical structure like 2 plus 2 equals 4 'doesn't care' whether we are adding up taxicabs or tomatoes. In this view, therefore, there is no reason why, once the devices of advertising have been isolated by semiotic analysis, they may not be 're-cycled' in counter-ideological message-making. Another opinion to be derived from semiotics argues against this, but there is insufficient space here to discuss the apparent contradiction.

Fig. 5

The rhetorical analysis of advertising may be conducted along three main 'planes': the image plane; the plane of the text (headline, caption, body-copy); and the plane of the text/image bond. For example, an image which showed a bottle of milk as big as a house would present a figure of *hyperbole* (overstatement). If we then added the headline "Pour Some More, Mum", the text would be based in *rhyme*, and we would have established a figure of *litote* (understatement) in the relationship of the text to the image.

Fig. 6

Let's take some further, actual examples: Fig. 5 is a visual *hyperbole* much like our hypothetical example except that in this case the exaggeration is doubly charged through sexual allusion; Fig. 6 is an example of *chiasmus* in the plane of the text; Fig. 7 presents a *paradox* in the text/image plane. . . . and may be worth considering in some more detail.

Fig. 7

The image in this example draws upon the iconography of poverty – the bath in a zinc tub, the squalid 'back yard', the washing on a line (as opposed to in a spin-dryer). These remarks suffice to show that this is 'poverty' in the definition of a particular culture at a particular historical juncture – the same assembly of signs might connote relative affluence in a 'third world' context. The striped T-shirt is associated in the British mind with the iconography of France and the sea, its connotation of 'St. Tropez-ness' establishes a figure of *irony* within the image.

It is likely that the people in the photograph will have been chosen for their – in Barthe's expression – 'canonic generality;' that is to say, each individual represents his or her own 'type', each individual stands for a class of individuals. In rhetoric the figure of *antonamasia* is the one in which the particular stands for the general. Nearly all advertising images contain this figure. Thus, the woman in our example represents all economically-disadvantaged mothers (there is no evidence in the picture which proves she is the mother of these children, but the very wide use of images of the family dictates that she represent one). The scene depicted here should cause no offence to either the poor or the comfortably-off: there are no torn clothes or matted hair, the children are being washed and (imminently) fed; this is a 'poor but honest' milieu.

The remarks I have made so far concern what is actually to be observed in the image; more observations could be added along these lines. Beyond what is to be seen in the image, however, there are many stories to be *construed* from what is seen. This photograph could serve equally well to illustrate a variety of stories. For example: 'one-parent families'; 'health in the home'; 'domestic life in industrial towns' . . . and so on. The photographic image can carry a large number of different meanings. It is 'polysemic.' Generally, the polysemy of the image is controlled by its juxtaposition with a verbal text.

Roland Barthes has identified two different functions which the verbal message can adopt in relation to the image, these he calls *anchorage* and *relay*. The text adopts a function of anchorage when, from a multiplicity of connotations offered by the image, it selects some and thereby implicitly rejects the others. Thus, in a cigarette advertisement, the contradictory connotations 'cigarettes give pleasure' and 'cigarettes give cancer' are selectively handled in such a caption as *'cool as a mountain stream'*, a simile which endorses the suggestion of pleasure while rejecting that of unwholesomeness.

In relay, the image and the lingusitic text are in a relationship of complementarity: the linguistic message explains, develops, expands the significance of the image. (Fig. 8 is a particularly clear and simple example of relay). In our previous example, the caption is in a relationship of relay to the image. 'It's all in the mind' is not amongst the connotations we might expect to be summoned by the image alone. It is not therefore 'anchored' from amongst the connotations already available. The rhetorical structure of the text/image relation in this case is that of *paradox*. The dominating connotation of the image may be labelled (but not contained) by the linguistic term 'poverty.' Substituting this term for the image gives us the statement: "Poverty. It's all in the mind." However, we know the poverty depicted in the image to be a material poverty, hence the paradox, and hence the effect gained by the juxtaposition of such a caption with such an image.

The semiotician Jacques Durand made these remarks in the course of his 1970 study of rhetoric in advertising: "The myth of 'inspiration,' of 'the idea,' reigns supreme in the creation of advertising at the present time. In reality, however, the most original ideas, the most audacious advertisements, appear as transpositions of rhetorical figures which have been indexed over the course of numerous centuries. This is explained in that rhetoric is in sum a repertory of the various ways in which we can be 'original.' It is probable then that the creative process could be enriched and made easier if the creators would take account consciously of a system which they use intuitively."

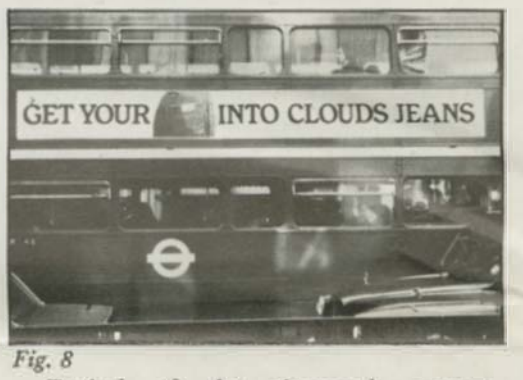

Fig. 8

Typical of the nineteenth century Romantic aesthetic attitudes which prevail in present-day writings on photography is the notion that there are unique essences within things and people which are ordinarily concealed from us but which artistic genius can reveal. This is an idea which photographers had handed down to them from the 'Fine Art' they originally sought to emulate (and often still wish to emulate, albeit they in the position of people rowing out to join a sinking ship). Largely, this idea is a projection of the market relations which characterise our commodity society: the concept of 'genius' guarantees the investment value of the product; the concept of transcendental 'essences' protects the product against practical interrogation.

Brecht took the view that what essences there are behind appearances are to be reached through investigation rather than through intuition. Photography has tended to treat us to an interminable rhetoric of 'humanity – its joys, its sorrows.' The material forces which cause such emotions and, further, shape our entire lives, may be described. It remains to be seen whether photography will become effective in showing them. What is certain is that if it is to do so, we need to treat the photographic image as an occasion for scepticism and questioning – not as a source of hypnosis.

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BRAVO BRAVO!

Manuel Alvarez Bravo *is a confusing photographer. His pictures of the dead worker and the naked woman wrapped in bandages are totally convincing. But others share the artiness of Eisenstein's Mexican film. (In Eisenstein's case, you suspect that the Sun illuminating his pictures also addled his brain.)*

To make one great picture in a lifetime can be an achievement. Manuel Alverez Bravo has managed three or four.

Bravo was born in Mexico City in 1902. He took up photography seriously in 1924 but continued to work as a government accountant until 1931. In the same year he sold his first print to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. As well as "personal" photography, Bravo recorded murals and others works of art. He also taught part time.

Edward Weston told him photography was "fortunate in having someone with your viewpoint."

In 1934 Bravo exhibited with Henri Cartier-Bresson in Mexico City's Palace of Fine Art. From 1943 he worked full-time as a photographer and cameraman with a film studio in Mexico. In 1959 he co-founded a foundation for Mexican plastic arts.

When Bravo came to London for his show at the Photographers Gallery, **Tom Picton** *and* **Marcos Valdivia** *talked to him for* **CAMERAWORK.** **Odile Bertin** *translated the tapes. We asked him if his famous picture of the dead striker had a political meaning:*

Bravo: Yes, of course. The political question at that time was the struggle for a minimum wage. Workers were very badly paid, they went on strike, and this man was killed. But when one sees the photograph by itself for the first time, I do not think one needs any more explanation, because in the background a part of the strikers' banner can be seen, and the attitude of the dead worker is not a general statement of violent death but of one heroic death.

Valdivia: *Did you personally feel involved in the event?*

Bravo: When a photographer is involved in an event, he is so involved and so much a part of it that he is not aware of his involvement.

Picton: *Has "the murdered worker" ever been used as a poster?*

Bravo: Yes, several times, for a political purpose. In fact, it was not used as a poster but appeared in left-wing magazines. I remember other occasions when it was published not in a political context, and it is interesting to see how it has been associated with the nude.

Picton: *Could you tell us how you happened to make "the woman in the bandages"?*

Bravo: Since it was a commission for the catalogue for a surrealist exhibition, I worked – without really planning to do it that way – as automatically as possible. I sent someone to buy the kind of cactus called *abrojos* in Spanish, or, "open eyes" and borrowed a blanket from the caretaker. I spoke on the telephone to a doctor friend and told him: "Come here and bring some bandages." He came very quickly, and I bandaged the girl and took the photographs. That is the way it happened. If you want to know why it happened that way, I think that the question of the bandages came about through an experience I had with a group of ballet dancers who came to Mexico. I saw the rehearsals and saw that they bandaged their feet, so I bandaged the feet and something more.

At that time it was not allowed anywhere to circulate photographs showing bodily hair. And I did not have a personal interest in it. The original photograph was a little more cut than as it is known now. It was going to be reproduced in three strips on the front cover with the same but in negative on the back. I thought it was an interesting format. But it was not published. Instead, another one was – called "The consecration of winter" which showed a branch of a withered tree and a stained glass window in a rather art nouveau style with a woman.

Picton: *How did you work as a photographer and for whom; for what kind of audience?*

Bravo: It is a difficult question. My photography has regularly gained approval both in and out of Mexico, and in the exhibitions in which I have been, my work has been liked, but that is all I can say. More, I would not know.

Picton: *Did you ever work with a group of photographers or usually by yourself?*

Bravo: By myself.

Valdivia: *Could you describe for us the atmosphere in Mexico when you, Buñuel, Weston, Diego Rivera and others were working there?*

Bravo: It was a period of struggle in which every person had to look after himself and work as he could. Relations between all of us were friendly, but we did not form what could properly be called a group. There were simply affinities and relationships.

Striking worker murdered, 1934

Valdivia: *But such a friendly atmosphere must have been very stimulating.*

Bravo: Certainly. That is why I consider that my work is derived from precisely those movements – essentially the movement in wall painting.

Valdivia: *It is said that Mexico is essentially a surrealist country.*

Bravo: That is what Breton says. In fact, Mexico can be a dramatic country, a country full of contrasts, even bordering on the fantastic, which does not precisely fit in the concept of surrealism which like any other "ism" is an academic term. Perhaps I can understand what Breton said as meaning a country where the artist can produce fantastic or surrealist art. In the case of my own work, for instance, I do not think it can be considered as surrealist except for three or four photographs like "the woman in the bandages," but all the others are fantasy-inspired by the country itself.

Valdivia: *But "the woman in the bandages" was done with a surrealist function for a surrealist exhibition, and very successfully so.*

Bravo: True, but you must see the basic difference which exists between that photograph and "the murdered worker." One is all spontaneity as opposed to the other, which is the product of complicated mind games and heaven-knows-what other subtleties.

Valdivia: *What can you tell us about the tradition surrounding death in Mexico?*

Bravo: People believe that there is a love of death, but they do not understand that it is not simply that, and that what in fact there is in Mexico is an ancient awareness of the duality of life and death, death being the end result of life, and that it is impossible to treat the two terms separately. This concept of duality we Mexicans receive as children, when in November, on the Day of the Dead, we are taken to the fair and buy toys of death and skulls of sugar, which we eat. Eating is an activity which sustains life, and this life is sustained by a skull.

Picton: *In* Painted Walls of Mexico *(1966) you wrote: "Popular Art is the art of the people. A popular painter is an artisan who, as in the Middle Ages, remains anonymous. His work needs no advertisement, as it is done for the people around him. . ." I agree very much with that; could you say something about it?*

Bravo: I think that what is said here about popular art can be applied to art in general. Actually in my opinion, and I said this in a lecture in Mexico at the Museum of Modern Art, it is very strange to go on talking about the art of painting, or of painting as an art, or photography as an art. I was asked out of the blue if photography was an art, but I shall come back to this later. Popular art is anonumous art made for some existing group of people, but naturally as time passes, this group is going to develop relationships with other groups, and the various contacts between groups will produce a change, or changes in the art in general – not only in popular art, but in all the arts. After a time, the names of the authors begin to be known, and even if they do not sign, it is known that such and such a work is the work of so and so; anonymity begins to be lost. From these relationships a group economy evolves which entails an even bigger change because as the natural laws of buying and selling come into play, it becomes necessary for the authors of works to invest less time and less money for greater reward. This phenomenon is bound to occur in any system of production. Thus, art is transformed and loses its meaning of popular art to become, at least in my opinion, a craft – which in reality it always was. So, when I was asked if photography was an art, I replied, "no." Photography is not an art, any more than painting, sculpture or engraving. Art does not exist because materials for painting, for sculpture or whatever it may be are bought. Art is created by the individual, and it is the artist who exists. But the general term cannot be called art; it is craft. An individual can be purely and simply a craftsman. In photography there is much more craftsmanship than art. Art has another dimension from craft. For instance, a person who keeps a shop where he does passport photographs or wedding photographs is practising a craft but not creating art. Art is created by the individual and not the material which he is handling.

Picton: *How does this apply in your own photographs? For example, if you had been an anonymous photographer you would not have had the same impact.*

Bravo: It would be exactly the same – it is not my fault that somebody suddenly got interested in my photographs. I did them as a means of self-expression for showing on a small scale, rather like the way in which things are made in a village of artisans. But as I said before when talking about the individuals from a group, their work is anonymous whether it is signed or not, because the individual is unknown. But there comes a moment when others become interested, and then the photographs become objects in themselves. They are no longer purely the expression of an event to be seen on a wall or to be reproduced in a magazine, but have been transformed into objects, and as objects they can be bought, whether they get sold or not.

Valdivia: *And so they are transformed into myth?*

Bravo: No, rather into merchandise. The myth is created afterwards around the author, with the purpose always of enhancing his commercial value.

Valdivia: *Quite right! However, I personally think that the work of Manuel Alvarez Bravo is the expression of a people.*

Bravo: Yes, of course. If one is concerned with the object-subject relationship, the country is bound to emerge. It is not that one wants to create a national art, but that national art arises when one responds to the heartbeat of a nation.

Picton: *Are you still taking photographs, or what kind of work are you involved in at the moment?*

Bravo: At the moment I am putting my records in order. I have got at least forty years of work, and during those forty years, I have taken no care of my negatives. When I am asked for a copy of such and such a negative which was published a long time ago, it has to be looked for and a lot of time is wasted in finding it. That is why I am putting my records in order, to fulfill a responsibility which I did not realise I was taking on at the time. But after that, what am I going to do? Generally what has happened in the past is that there are periods in which I do absolutely nothing. Then I begin again with great difficulty and failures until suddenly I get into the rhythm again, and my capacity for work returns. I hope that the same thing is going to happen this time, otherwise. . .

Picton: *Are you doing any work now apart from that?*

Bravo: No. Nothing apart from the records.

Picton: *What will happen to all those negatives in the future, in, say, fifty years?*

Bravo: Only time will tell.

The have-nots are most easily approached if you try to come down to their level, at least in every way but the camera you use. Don't go out photographing wearing your Pierre Cardin blazer over a gaudy Florida-bought sportshirt and shuffling around in Gucci shoes. I always dress in, or take along, an old pair of blue jeans with matching attire, down to a worn pair of sneakers, when I feel have-nots are to be encountered. If you're with a load of nifty dressers, ditch 'em, pretend you don't know 'em. You'll see how the atmosphere improves.

Keppler on the SLR
from Popular Photography
April, 1976

GOLDEN RULES OK?

Trained throughout childhood in painting and drawing, American photographer, **Robert Golden,** *turned to the camera at the age of 12. After studying history at university, he spent one year at the London School of Film Technique. He then worked in New York for three and one half years as a freelance photographer on photo essays and a variety of social issues. Before returning to live in England, he was introduced to Marxism and the Zone System. Both these interacted together and opened up whole new areas of understanding.*

Settling to live in London, he began to concentrate on documenting work, initially approaching children's book publishers with an essay on boxing. As a result of this, Kestrel books invited him to work on a series of books for children. The first four were **Mineworker, Carworker, Farmworker** *and* **Dockworker.** *These were all done in conjunction with writer,* **Sarah Cox.** *They work together on all aspects of the photographs, text, layout, presentation. Six more titles are scheduled for publication. Robert Golden is at present documenting* **Unemployment** *with Sarah Cox, and some of this work will be on exhibition.*

Jo Spence *talked to Robert Golden for* **CAMERAWORK.**

Coal picking, Jarrow, 1976

Who is your audience?

I wish the working class to be my audience. Which sector or group depends on the project at hand. In the children's books, the audience is specifically the children of the class, and to a lesser degree, their parents and teachers. In the unemployment project that we are working on presently, the audience is working people in general, but specifically, shop stewards, militant workers, politicals, as well as the unemployed. In my exhibitions, I hope to reach the same people by making the work available as essays on walls to be used by Trade Unions and their branches, Trades Councils, working peoples' institutions and political groups for weekend conferences, in works canteens, union halls and other meeting places.

Because of the political content of my work, I believe that it can be embraced as a whole only by working class people and by middle class people of leftist views. But the scarred urban landscapes, the lined and weary faces, and the moments of exhilaration and anger are sights and experiences which most people are aware of in their daily lives. It is through these more general elements of the subject matter that any person may enter the spirit of the work.

What are you trying to show?

I wish to reflect back to viewers their own experience and humanity and provide an outline of their struggles. In the children's books, we specifically attempted to create a broader class awareness and sense of self-pride in the children, while revealing to them both the skills necessary and the hazards encountered in production. In the unemployment book, we hope to clarify relationships between past and present events, and between present everyday life and the forces which determine its shape, especially concerning the tragedy of unemployment.

Is the 'political photgrapher' more than a mirror?

A mirror image is two dimensional, flat and lifeless. Russian and Chinese socialist realism along with some forms of Western advertising are just that. The term, 'political photographer' implies a commitment; once there is a commitment, one does not mirror, one refracts. It is in this refraction process, as a picture is being made, that the web of subjective factors informs the objective phenomena. Experience, perception, prejudice, technical and formal expertise and intellectual comprehension all play a part in defining the nature and success of the final print, book or exhibition.

How much of your work is done because you think it is politically important, as opposed to requests from publishers?

I make a living by doing commercial work. Unfortunately, it dominates too much of my time. The children's books are a way in which I may earn money while producing books and photographs of value, too, to me. Otherwise, as in the unemployment project, the commercial work pays for the political work. I do the latter when I can — evenings, weekends, days when there is a lull in my commercial work schedule.

Why do you concentrate on work?

I have not decided to concentrate on work but rather on the working class experience of my life. The fact that people's positions in life are largely defined by their relationships to the means of production (are they bosses, bankers, politicians, self-employed, workers?), and that the central experience of that relationship is rigorously defined by the daily grind of work (whether caring for home and children, or working in the mill, mine, factory, farm or office) means that I have had to concentrate heavily on the work experience. I have photographed many other areas of life in the past few years as well.

Is it important to align yourself to a particular party?

If a photographer chooses to involve him/herself in social questions, then intellectual clarity is as important as emotional commitment and good intentions. There are so many moments in an event to photograph, so many events to choose from, so many angles, filters, tonal ranges, printing methods and controls, grain structures, depths of field ranges, etc. to select from, that without a clear-sighted view, one is lost.

The socialist photographer works in a cultural and critical wilderness. Primarily the photographer must realise his/her relationship and commitment to the working class and to the revolutionary party. Once this is realised, either with or without the aid of a particular revolutionary group, the newly-developed view of the photographer will tend to promulgate an association with the group which most closely holds that view.

In a non-revolutionary period, it is perhaps more necessary for photographers and other artists to be clearly aligned to and involved with the more general problems of the working class than to be deeply involved with the programme of a specific left group as sectarianism in a non-combat situation is as likely to close as many avenues of awareness and turn away as many eyes of the potential audience as non-commitment in a period of struggle is likely to render one's work meaningless.

Do you think the way in which you learn to be a photographer is important?

I think the way in which a person encounters the craft is of secondary importance to the cultural and political environment in which that person develops intellectually. These influences count for more than the tiny world of photographic craft and aesthetics in defining the nature of a person's work.

The student of the medium learns of it through books, from teachers in state or private institutions, or by working for a photographer. In each case, the unity of form, content and technique exists and is expressed in the transmission of the ideas, whether consciously or not, by the writer, teacher or boss. Underlying these ideas will be class-biased assumptions, personal obsessions, prejudice and some consciously thought out political views. All of these things which influence the work of the master will influence the work of the student.

In my experience, the student would do better to be instructed by a mediocre photographer of Marxist views than a highly-accomplished photographer of conventional views. The technical and formal conceptions will at least be formulated within a progressive framework, and in the end, the passion for a particular set of values and ideas will carry the photographer into a thorough search for a sympathetic technical and formal vocabulary.

Does a photographer know when their own level of social awareness is relevant to the problems of working people?

Most contemporary photographers are from middle class backgrounds. The emphasis of contemporary middle class culture, as most culture of Western Europe since the Renaissance, is placed on individual experience and values; therefore, most contemporary 'art' photographs manifest these individualistic concerns. As the major experiences of working people are collective, the photographs are, in the main, meaningless to them.

The following subject matter dominates the work: landscapes — usually in the romantic tradition of Weston or the mystical tradition of Minor White; reportage of poor, homeless or other politically-weak sections of the population; women in various stages of undress in 'natural' situations; English festivals — which seem so often to sneer at the people pictured and to dismiss the subtleties of form and technique; portraits of people peculiar in appearance or awkward in a situation — often in the demented style of Diane Arbus; and a host of quasi-surreal

Old-age home, London

It is true that we have no stage to present our subject matter upon until we know how to use the tools to saw the timber, hang the drapery, etc., but while learning technique is a primary step in a photgrapher's education, it is more important to know what is to be presented. After all, the nature of the subject matter may dictate one sort of stage or curtain as opposed to another.

or commonplace (snapshot like) subject matter. While these images may at times be inventive and appealing to middle class audiences, they are by and large neither entertaining to working people, nor concerned with their social or personal problems. The subject matter isolates the work from all but aesthetes, literateurs and students.

The underlying content of this subject

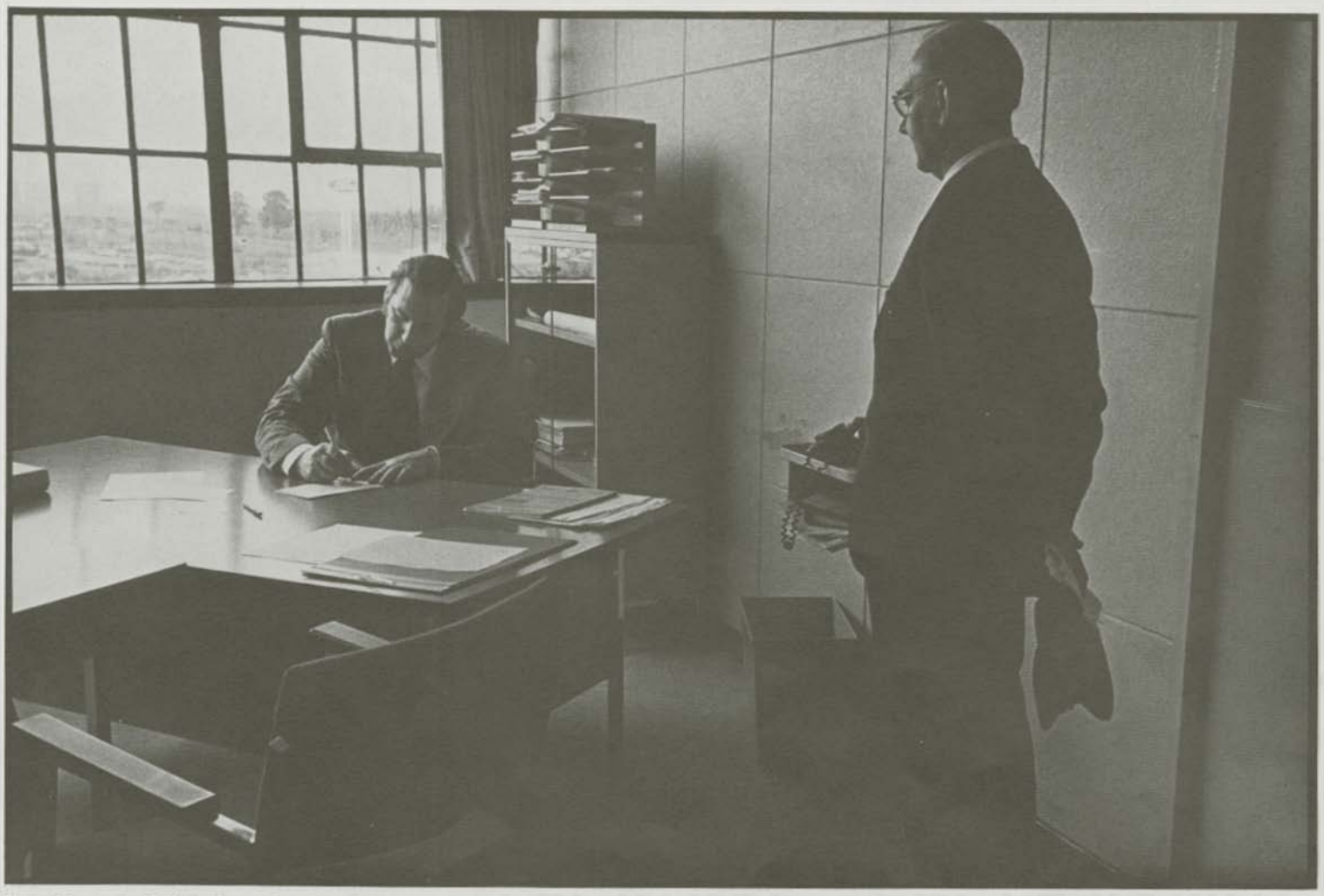
matter describes autobiographical observations, mystical or well-intentioned but unanalytical political thoughts. Unfortunately, the autobiographics are only as interesting as the lives they reflect; the mysticism has little meaning to people who must day by day confront the real power of the world and their representatives in the guise of managers, police and foremen and women; and the politics are irrelevant to working class relationships. Thus, the content isolates the work as well from the mass of the people.

Because of the class nature of this work, and because the ruling class no longer occupies the centre of the historical stage, but is slowly being pushed aside by a new main character, their culture generally and their photographic art specifically, like their political and economic system, is effete. Their culture is out of step with the most important undercurrents of this period, and though this photographic work is foisted upon the people as the true representation of the 'art' of photography, it remains outside and will continue to remain outside the interests of the 19,000,000 wage earners and their families in Great Britain.

But the condition is not all negative. For the last several years, there have been dynamic egalitarian trends revealing themselves. Some community photographic projects have helped to bring otherwise isolated people together, presenting images to be discussed and ideas to be discovered through the exhibition of photographs from the community; the women's movement has produced a volume of work which has reported, analysed and revealed to people ideas which have helped in the struggle for identity and partial liberation; the left-liberal photojournalists' documentation of the black liberation and anti-war movements in the States helped to reveal the injustices and tragedy of those two struggles; and now in Great Britain, several groups of photographers are intentionally documenting the class struggle.

Eventually out of these documentarist trends will develop the strands of a truly proletarian cultural photographic expression which will command the interest and serve the needs of the working people.

Photography is today an accepted part of our cultural vocabulary, and as such, photographers should be concerned – not with photography – but with thoughts, social experience and problems which are central to contemporary life. Only then will photography break out of the narrow aesthetic tendencies in which it is trapped to the outer world of human life, and only then will photographers win a larger audience for their work.



Receiving permission, Dagenham

"Recognition of the struggle for the right of workers at the point of production to find a way to make public the true nature of their working conditions through the use of film is long overdue.

British Leyland shop stewards at a Coventry plant, faced with the demand from their work force to break through the barrier of misrepresentation and silence, called in **Cinema Action** to film their work-in.

Whilst in the factory, Leyland security men called the police, who arrested and jailed the film crew, later releaseing them without charge.

Two weeks later, the Leyland management picked out one of the many stewards involved Jack Sprung and sacked him. This act of flagrant victimisation was backed up by the regional and national press and television, who launched a trial by media with headlines reading 'Leyland Row over Mr. Sprung's Spies.' (The fact that Jack Sprung was not the senior steward who invited Cinema Action into the plant was ignored in favour of a vicious and libellious personal attack against him, his family and against Cinema Action."

Excerpt from letter to ACCT Journal,
Film and Television Technician,
June, 1976

"The location of the action in **Coronation Street** is mainly the enclosed world of the street itself. The community contains no children, and its members are rearely seen at work. In fact, the work that we do see going on could be loosely described as petit-bourgeois: shopkeeping, the running of a public house, Len Fairclough (a self-employed builder) banging a nail into a wall. The 'world' of Coronation Street (and we are encouraged to think of it as a microcosm of the world, a representative sample – witness for example the title sequence showing the street as just one among many thousands of similar streets) is safe, secure, 'apolitical,' a place where nothing more than petty bickering, gossip and the occasional feud is allowed to disturb the nature and structure of the characters' lives. They are essentially locked into, and resigned to, their position and role in society. The families, apparently lacking children, relatives and employment, lead insular, isolated, static lives. Their dynamic potential for any action that might transform their own or anyone else's existence is entirely absent . . . the structured absences are deliberate and significant. Their significance lies in the negative and paralysed protrayal of the working class, a portrayal that is reinforced by the occasional 'social realist' TV documentary, where the images depict a sad and acquiescent group of people."

Manuel Alvarado in **Eight Hours are Not a Day,** *published in British Film Institute's* **Fassbinder,** *edited by Tony Rayns.*

"Tape recorders, ordinary cameras and cine cameras, are already extensively owned by wage-earners. The question is why these means of production do not turn up at work places, in schools, in the offices of the bureaucracy – in short, everywhere where there is social conflict. By producing aggressive forms of publicity which were their own, the masses could secure evidence of their daily experiences and draw effective lessons from them.

Naturally bourgeois society defends itself against such prospects with a battery of legal measures. It bases itself on the law of trespass, on commercial and offical secrecy. While its secret services penetrate everywhere and plug into the most intimate conversations, it pleads a touching concern for confidentiality and makes a sensitive display of worrying about the question of a privacy in which all that is private is in the interest of the exploiters. Only a collective, organised effort can tear down these paper walls."

Extract from **Mass Media and Mass Society**
by Hans Magnus Enzensberger
translated by Stuart Hood.

End of the shift, London depot

Overleaf: Kellingley colliery, Yorkshire discussion before the shift.

Driving down Park Aven

Ralph Gibson's *pictures are becoming as simple as semaphore flags. In his* **Quadrant** *exhibition, 16 x 20 prints of photographs taken 18 inches from the subject are his equivalent of abstract expressionist painting.*

Quadrants *deals with the problem of exhibiting photographs in an art gallery. So many photographs which look good in a photographer's hand die on the gallery wall. Ralph Gibson has faced this problem right on and hit it with a meat cleaver.*

Marxists believe that the means of production determine the ideology, but distribution is equally demanding. When painters produce an exhibition, they have to think very clearly about the problems of where they are going to be shown. Ralph Gibson is the first photographer who has thought about these problems intelligently.

Ralph Gibson photographed his Quadrants *for the Castelli Art Gallery in New York. After it was put up, he said that the impact focused in the middle of the gallery. Perhaps Gibson's best contribution to photography has been his realisation of this phenomenon.*

The central problem of our time for photographers ceases to be political or social but rather of how their pictures will look on a gallery wall. Gibson solves these problems with a painterly intelligence. Working close to his subjects, Gibson solves the problems of out of focus edges by using a depthless black. He has invented a painterly photography. His photographs solve the academic problems of 20th Century painting – not those of photography.

Ralph Gibson has been working in photography since the 1950's. He spent three years in the U.S. Navy as a photographer's mate. After attending San Francisco Art Institute, he worked for one and a half years assisting **Dorothea Lange.**

Before beginning his rise to fame (see interview), he did advertising shots for Eli Lilly Pharmaceuticals, book covers for Bantam and Dell books, fashion pictures for **Look** *magazine and essays for* **New York** *and* **Art Forum.** *He also occasionally worked as a 16mm cameraman, making a documentary for* **CBS** *and working with* **Robert Frank** *on* **Conversations in Vermont.**

Gibson began publishing books in 1967 with **The Strip,** *55 photographs from the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles.* **The Hawk** *followed in 1968 with 50 photographs from a play of the same name. Robert Frank wrote the foreword for his third book,* **ACLU 1969 Appointment,** *published by American Civil Liberties Union.*

As is apparent in the interview, Ralph Gibson took a clear, close look at his life in 1970, and his photographs became very different. Since then he has published three books – **The Somnambulist, Deja Vu** *and* **Days at Sea.**

Ralph Gibson came to Britain for the first workshop held at the **Photographers Place,** *Derbyshire, this Easter. This was jointly run by* **Paul Hill** *and* **Thomas Joshua Cooper.** *Everybody who was there voted it a great success. One of the participants,* **Ron McCormick,** *interviewed Ralph Gibson for* **CAMERAWORK.**

Gibson takes his pictures at 1/250 second at f16.

from Deja Vu

I remember one day I was driving down Park Avenue with Robert (Frank), and I was telling him that I wasn't happy with my career – I was in love with this girl and all these things – he was driving and I was in the passenger seat, and he said: "Well, you have two choices, you could probably make it commercially, become successful rather quickly." Because I would occasionally get jobs, I had the 'chops,' I had the technique to do just about anything, but I didn't have the interest in it. He said: "You could make it commercially pretty fast if you wanted to, or you could be an artist and wait – and then later become famous like me! " And then he turned around and looked at me and said: "Actually you only have one choice! " And that was enough to make me really break all interest with the notion of being a professional photographer and doing good work on assignment. Which is one of the biggest myths that ever came down the road – that you can do good stuff on assignment.

So about that time, I entered into a period of protracted torpor in which I just slept all day and did very little work, was deeply in debt, had a lot of my cameras pawned and stuff like that. But I was reading a lot, people like Alain Robbs-Grillet, people like that. And then one weekend I went out into the country and I shot quite a lot of film, I felt rather inspired, and I made in one weekend what was to become the first eighteen pages of *The Somnambulist;* the floating nude, the head in the doorway, many of the photographs that were later to become widely published. But at the time I totally couldn't stand them; I hated those pictures when they first came out of my head. They just seemed to fly off the contact sheet; I didn't even know who had taken them; I couldn't remember what I was thinking of or why I was taking them. I printed them – I recognised that they had a certain power, but they caused me great anxiety because they had nothing to do with the previous twelve years' work, they didn't seem to relate to anything I had attempted to do or to the moods that I was trying to generate through my documentary work. I was living in the Chelsea Hotel (New York) at the time, in a very small room, and would have them tacked up on a piece of board at the foot of my bed. Robert was in Mexico, and he wired me to come and join him, so I managed to get the price of ticket and off I went. When I came back from Mexico, after the cultural shock and all that, I remember walking into my hotel room and seeing the photographs and all of a sudden realising that my camera, because of the speed of its shutter and many other things had, I believed, contacted a dream reality. The minute it occurred to me that those photographs were going to be what I call dream images, I then had my point of departure. I very quickly wrote the prologue for *The Somnambulist* in which I stated that while sleeping a person reappears elsewhere on the planet, becomes two people and then perhaps chooses to do so as a voluntary idea. I wrote that prologue in about fifteen minutes, I then very quckly generated a 32-page version of the book which I then set about trying to get published. People were very interested but they would want to change it, to make their own mark on it. Somehow that book had come to represent an autonomy, a sort of reaction against all the subservience of freelance work. I had to have satisfaction this way, I wasn't able to let people change it, I didn't want to pass the buck, I didn't want to blame anybodv for its failures. I wanted to take all the bows and all the responsibility.

Fortunately, nobody was going to adhere to those terms, and it took me three years while I was trying various ways of getting the book published, and I was utterly obsessed with getting it published. I used to wake up in the middle of the night chewing my teeth, thinking about it. It was a period of great pressure and anxiety because it was as usual a highly-impoverished period, and I remember that one night I made a pact, and I don't know who it was with, but I projected my thoughts as far out to the universe as I could, and I simply said in some kind of an arcane prayer that I was willing to die if I could get that book published. That would be a fair bargain, my life would have certainly fulfilled itself and that was all I wanted! But at that moment I became rather desperate, I realised at a certain point that what I should do is publish it myself. Somehow that notion dawned on me, and I very quickly formed a limited partnership. I just went to a lawyer, and he drew up a piece of paper. I sold some shares in the venture to the graphic designers and the art directors who had hired me on assignments. I sold four shares and then promptly spent the money. I used it to pay up the rent and other things. And then by chance, I got a very big assignment in California, and I made enough money in two weeks out at MGM to do the book. When the book appeared, it changed my situation drastically, many doors opened to me, and I realised that I was going to have a slightly different life.

The Somnambulist is the first time I ever made a personal statement, the first time I ever had the technical ability as an artist and is the first time I ever succeeded at dealing with any of my own problems, my own needs and doubts. Strangely enough, to have done something as personal as that and then to have it so well received, produced a very interesting response in me, and it meant that I was being rewarded for the one time in my life that I had taken any risk or tried to stay pure. I had been a commercial photographer for twelve years, when I had bent over continually, I'd let them cut them in half and tell me what to shoot. Well, no ass-hole is ever going to tell me what to take a picture of again – and furthermore, he's not going to say whether or not it's a successfully- done photograph because I'm the ass-hole now. I'm the one who says whether or not a photograph is good enough!

During this period, I was very concerned with the idea of producing a deep, three-dimensional space. I noticed that if I stared intently at something, it would appear as though I was looking out of two holes in the back of a mask. I would somehow feel the inside of the back of my face, and I wanted to include that in the photograph. That led to me putting my hand in the picture, it was some kind of subjective statement. I realised that I wasn't so much photographing how things looked, I wanted to show either how they felt or how I felt about seeing them. I was more interested in producing a mood than adhering to some any particular notion of reality.

A lot of the camera handling techniques that I had acquired during the street shooting period remained available to me, and during *The Somnambulist* period I didn't set up many pictures, actually I wouldn't set up, but I would start from a posed position.

As I was working on the sequence, I would think – "follow the tone, follow the tone" where I wanted the mood to last, much like a key signature in music.

I made that book out of a set of deeply-buried personal needs that somehow resolved themselves in my own life. I don't know what a dream is, but I now certainly know a lot more about how I define my own.

I'm a musician too, and I was probably at my peak as a classical guitarist during the period I was working on *The Somnambulist,* and so a lot of these ingredients that I was learning from music and from literature influenced my work. At one time I had a graph on *The Somnambulist,* and I actually had key signatures. It is divided into three sections and has three modulation points which I consider to be key changes for getting from one section to the next. Another thing about the book is you can close every two pages and open every four, you can open every eight, and there will be additional parallels available. It's a very tight piece that I worked at for three years so that it could work any possible way.

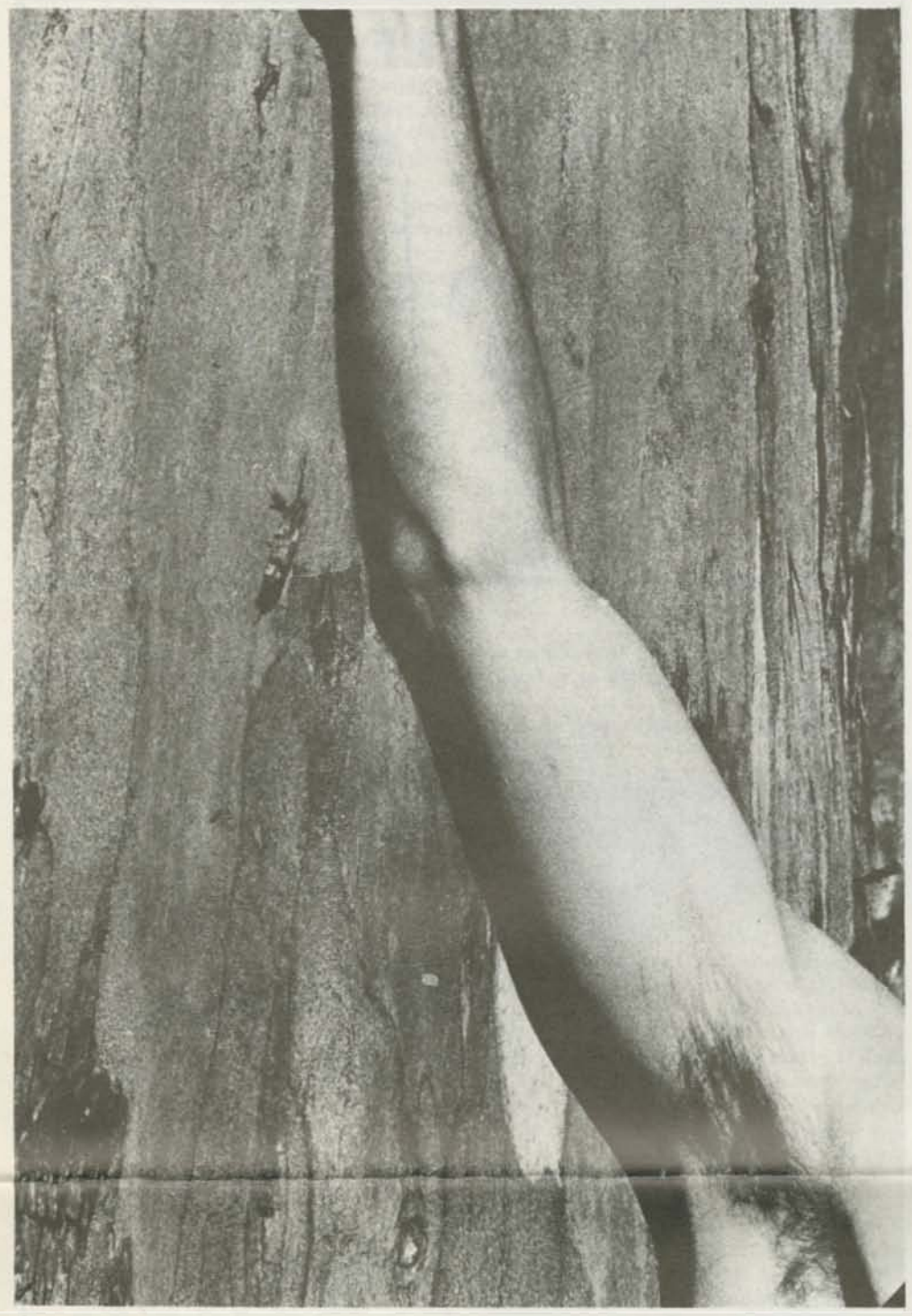
How did you present the work in Quadrants *that was different from your previous projects?*

Well, I put it on 16 x 20-inch paper with the borders left, they are signed and numbered and just placed under a sheet of glass with no mounts and they were placed on a white wall.

How were they related to each other?

They were specifically unrelated to one another, with no continuing references to each other. One line filled the four walls. The order mattered a great deal so that there wouldn't be any correlation or reference made to the previous photographs. I wanted the show to begin with one photograph but other than that whenever it shows elsewhere they can hang it however they want. Whereas with the work from the books, they

ue with Robert (Frank)...



from Quadrants

from Quadrants

always have to take the order of the books. At Castelli's, I exhibited them as single images, and the show was made for the space, I had enough space for thirty 16 x 20's, so I didn't make thirty-five.

Another thing with the *Quadrants* work is that it was very easy to print, there was very little manipulation compared with *The Somnambulist* in which there was very schmaltzy, heavy printing. Even though it was 16 x 20's, the *Quadrants* prints were the easiest prints that I have ever made. It's more in the eye now, and the more it gets in the eye, the less time I have to spend in the darkroom with them.

Abstract expressionism was the first kind of painting that I really understood, and I particularly admire the work of Clifford Still – sort of jagged forms, although recently I have been studying the work of Malevich who is a Russian Constructivist

The Somnambulist was three years' work, and some of the pictures go back a couple of years before that, so it seems that now I can get more in less time. Each year I see how many rolls of film I shoot, I used to shoot three thousand rolls. I still shoot as often now, but I use less film – I get a higher yield. I actually got the *Quadrants* pictures on about one hundred rolls.

I'm shooting colour now, and that's a radical move, it's a big risk for me, but then at the same time, it's no risk whatsoever because I know that anything that I really work hard enough at, if I'm willing to pay the price, will work out.

The exhibition is very appropriate in terms of what I am trying to say in the work now but also because I am going to live from the sale of my prints. In a couple of years, if I do lectures or workshops, it will be because I want to, not because I need the money as is the case now. I want to live exclusively from the sale of my work, and this year, for the first time, I just about can. I care about showing. I think it is important too – that's the form I'm interested in, and it happens to be the nature of the times right now. It's an interesting challenge, making a show that matters is very hard to do. After all, any gallery in the world has twelve to twenty shows a year, any museum always has a dozen shows up at once that are continually changing, so making a show that makes a mark is very much harder to do than is making a book. If you want to show, you have got to sell – I won't have a show that doesn't have a rigid guarantee of sales.

Exhibiting also has its risks, you are revealing more about your craft and your skill in an exhibition, a little five by seven inch duo tone reproduction can cover a multitude of sins, but you hang a 16 x 20 up there, and that print had better be good in every sense of the word. It has to lay flat, it has to be dried well, it has to be signed well, everything has to be perfect – it is harder to do.

Never give your pictures away for free, because as long as you are willing to give them for the gratuity of reproduction, it means that you are considering yourself and your work beholden and subservient to somebody who is going to publish them. It's a very presumptious thing to think that anyone wants to look at your pictures. I am still amazed that anybody wants to look at mine, but if they do, then I'm going to give them something at least that is the best value.

In photography in America, you come along through the Establishment, if at all. That is to say, bright students are picked out by young curatorial interns, and it is usual in America to have somebody behind you. Now, for example, the Museum of Modern Art, or for that matter, any institution, can only effectively – morally even – get behind a few people. And they really get behind them, make whole careers, and it goes on for years. Well, I realised that I couldn't wait that long, and I had't come through an institution, I had to establish myself, and so I didn't wait around for the Museum of Modern Art to kiss me on the forehead when I'm sixty years old.

Great dealers are visionaries, they have the great vision. Leo Castelli has probably altered the course of art history with his advanced perceptions.The work he has done to the history of painting and sculpture is beyond belief and he hasn't struck out yet. He told me that when he brought Yves Klein over, they laughed him out of town, and it took him twenty years.

For many years I had a great arrogance and sustained a chip on my shoulder against anybody who could help me. Let me tell you – everybody thinks that the dealers are exploitive, but they're not. Nobody is making a nickel out of photography compared with what they are used to! I hung my show in Castelli's gallery, and there were thirty prints selling at $300 apiece. If he had sold them all, it would only have been nine grand! Right after me, Jasper Johns came on with his first painting show in nine years, the cheapest painting was $70,000, and the most expensive one, $150,000 – but one was sold even before the show opened! Now, if he was in it for the bucks, he could have got a lot more mileage out of his wall space than he did out of my show. He has told me that he shows the work because he is excited by it.

A photograph is not worth that much, we might see the day when it hits a thousand dollars or something like that for very small editions. They are not worth very much unless they harbour incredible content and unless they become extremely rare, even the vintage stuff, a big dealer will sell a stereo for four or five hundred bucks. Now I know a dozen painters under 35 that nobody has ever heard of, and who are getting those prices. We are not in it for the bread, and I feel highly privileged to be able to make a living from it. There are other ways you can make money. You can get grants. I get invited to speak a lot, and that pays well – and that's all the monetary rewards. Even the sale of prints, by the time the dealer takes his commission – which, by the way, they richly deserve – it took me years to realise that, but what my dealer has done to organise my affairs is unbelievable and worth every penny of it.

I'll never die rich, I know how high it can go. I'll get satisfaction, I'll have recognition for my work, and I'll do well with the ladies, but I'll never die rich.

"Consider the pictures by Ralph Gibson, so very much of the instant, a moment chosen out of all possible moments for its particular revelations and symbolic content. And look, too, to the careful juxtaposition of the images – alone they have visual strength, together they take on a new and more exciting aspect: as information is interchanged between the pictures the gap between them diminishes, what was previously a blank space begins to gain in activity and the time lag that separated the images vanishes."

Excerpt from introduction by **Peter Turner** *to a portfolio of Gibson's* **Quadrants** *pictures in* **Creative Camera International Year Book 1975.**

The artist must sell himself to get ahead like any other person trying to make a living.

Jeff Perrone
Art Forum

We also use film to take pictures

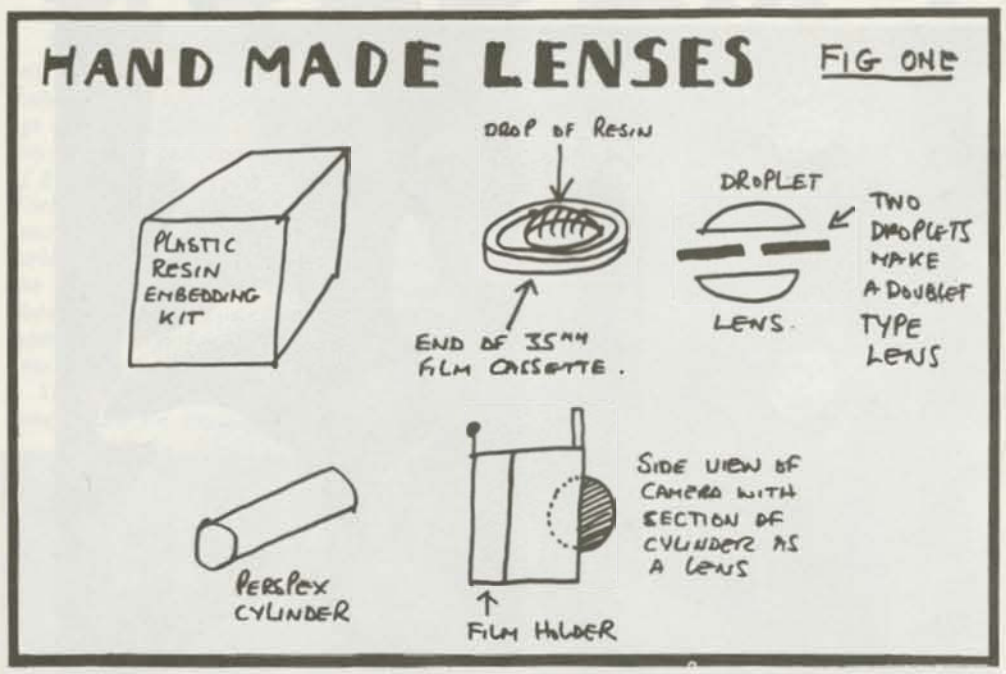


Fig. 1

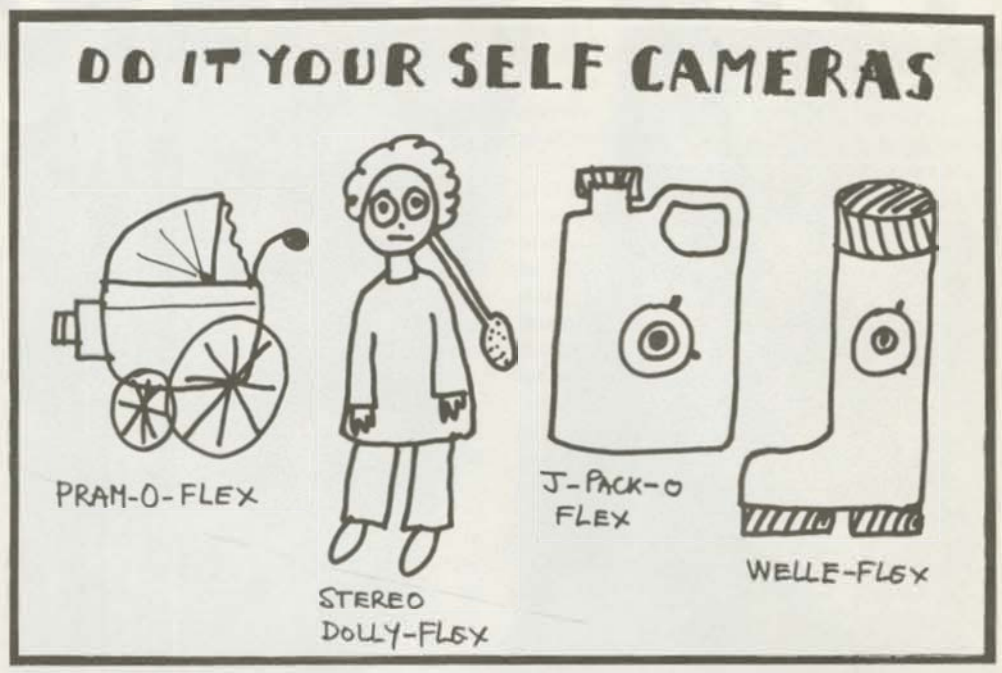


Fig. 3

Terry Dennet *runs a photography group for 5 to 15 year-old kids at the South Island Children's Workshop, an out-of-school-hours play and education project in Lambeth, London.*

The following article is a condensed version of the slide talk he gave at the recent one-day seminar, **Kids and Photography – In and Out of School,** *held at the* **Half Moon Photography Workshop** *on 9 May 1976.*

At South Island Workshop we are interested in photography *and* creativity. We are getting kids to make things out of nothing, taking ordinary things, breaking them up and recreating them into something which is their own.

Creative approaches to problem-solving have been popularised by people like De Bono (Lateral Thinking) and by the American, Zogan (The Approaches Method), but it is still thought of as rather unorthodox despite the fact that this method of teaching turns kids (and adults) on.

It is extremely important to stop kids thinking in rigid hierarchical ways; normally the school structure is so rigid you can't think outside the curriculum. If kids can do that in photography, they can do it socially, politically and in many other ways.

A lens is basically just a prism that splits up light. When you think in this way, it is very easy to make new discoveries. For instance, we've found that even a St. Michaels honey jar is a possible lens (Fig 1 and Fig 2).

A complete camera is also not difficult to make, providing you reduce it in the same way to its basic elements. What is a camera except a light-tight container with a lens on one end and a film-holder on the other? Our attempts to make cameras from almost

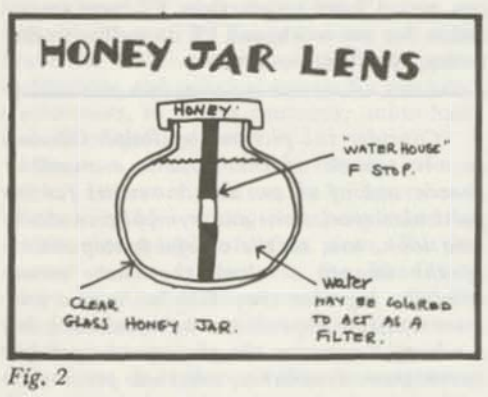


Fig. 2

nothing (Fig. 3) have produced pottery pinhole cameras, "Hat-o-blads", "Welliflex's" and the "J-Pak" camera.

None of them is suitable for manufacture in a camera factory, but they do work, and the kids who designed them have acquired a basic understanding of the theory and practice of the camera. More importantly, though they have begun to learn that knowledge is not just re-assembling and repeating bits of information as "right answers," but a process of creative thinking.

We introduce kids to photographic process with photograms which require minimal facilities. For photograms you can use an enlarger or you can use a bare bulb, or even daylight.

In making photograms, kids learn from a very early stage to do developing and printing. What we do is to do everything wrong as well as everything right. It is important to know that if you switch the light on, you fog the paper. But you can also learn that fogged paper can be used as well.

This way of teaching by doing things "wrong" is very important as part of our thinking. Not only as a means of showing kids that they will fog printing paper if they turn on the white light – the process should not end there, but also as a means of pointing out that doing things wrong can maybe lead to doing other things right. A sheet of fogged paper is not "useless"; it can be turned into a photo painting (as can old and out-dated paper), simply by painting it with developer. As the paper has already been fogged by light, it blackens immediately (Fig. 4).

You can teach kids how to use photographic materials this way – working in the light – they call it magic paper and magic water. The image springs up immediately; as soon as you touch it with developer, it starts to turn black. If you use diluted developer, it turns gray, so you have got a whole range of tones. Most of the photo paintings are by 5, 6 and 7 or 8 year-olds.

So far you haven't needed a darkroom – you can do this anywhere, just use a blackout curtain – you don't need an enlarger.

I've got nothing here to show you – the kids always take all their stuff home. So when you work on a project, try to keep two or three back to show to other people. These are all turn-ons for kids – all creativity based. We took a whole series of images; you can see how kids relate to one another; you can take pictures of each individual kid and get different kids to colour different people's pictures. People they like they might colour in a certain way; people they hate, they might gouge the eyes out or something. For group dynamics, this is really useful information. Best group ratio is about 1 to 6; when I started teaching, I tried 1 to 12, which is crucifying. If you are really experienced with kids, 1 to 8 is fine –

Fig. 4

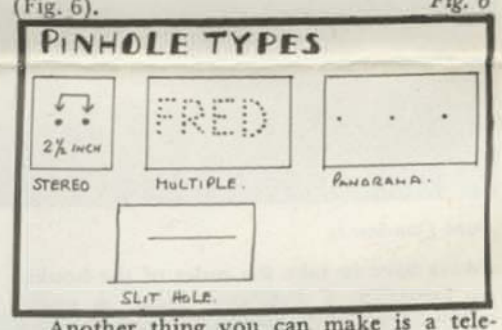
but normally, 1 to 6 (or 1 to 4 if you can manage it). You then relate as a family, which is really important.

When it comes to photographing, there are two other aspects – give the kids cameras and they can go out immediately and take pictures, or you can have what is called a Project Group – you don't go individually; you go as a small group at all different levels. Some kids have used cameras, some haven't, so the expert kids help the less able.

My main preoccupation over the last eighteen months has been pinhole photography for which you need very little in the way of equipment. A pinhole camera is just a simple box with a hole in it which is so small it makes points of light which form an image on sensitised material. We use bromide paper and sheet film, and you can also use reversal colour paper. The smaller the hole, the sharper the picture. But if the hole is too small, then the material (aluminium foil or thin black plastic) will be too thick relative to the hole, so you will in effect have a tunnel down which light is flooding. This will vignette the image, and you will get an unacceptable result. We have worked out a number of charts for pinholing and designed a pinhole darkroom – a portable darkroom outfit – so you can load pinholes in the street and actually develop them (Fig. 5). In a later model, we are going to have a lid made of coloured perspex. You can then look through and see what is going on inside the box. The kids learn to make, load and develop the pinholes themselves. We discovered that different materials have different speeds. Bromide paper is about 5 ASA. The procedure for developing pinhole negatives on paper is exactly the same as developing prints. You can then make a contact print with your paper negative by putting it under another sheet of photographic paper to get a positive. We also use film to take pictures.

We have discovered that you can make many types of pinholes and get different effects by bending the paper (curvilinear effect). Most people have only used single pinholes, but some have used stereo which is two holes two and one half inches apart. We have also done multiple pinholes where you can write your name in pinholes. Try FRED in pinhole images. You need the pinholes very close to the paper so you get small circles. This is good for doing diagrams with kids, too. The panoramic can be as long as you want it to be, with a pinhole every two and one half inches across a sheet of 20 x 16 paper. A slit also functions as a pinhole, which is worth remembering (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6



Another thing you can make is a telephoto pinhole. There was a man in 1900 who discovered you could put a negative (concave) lens behind a pinhole and get a bigger image. In fact, you could get a telephoto lens. Taking that a bit further, if you move the lens, you have got a variable focal length system (a zoom lens in fact) so then you have got a zoom pinhole! That's what I am working on at the moment.

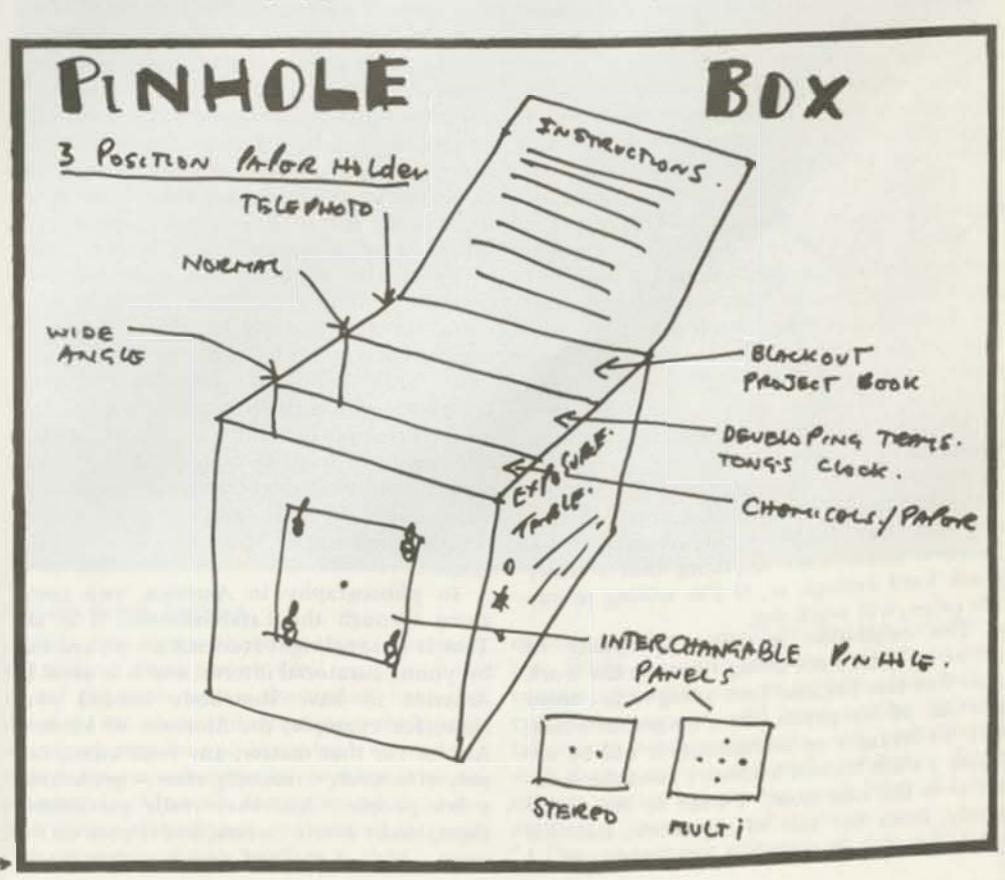


Fig. 5 →

In My Daughter's Image

by Sue West

Photography of children like other art forms is constantly changing in style and in opinion as to what is considered "acceptable." With the constant repetition of a new "fashionable" image created by media, there evolves a change in style which may in turn come to be accepted as the norm.

We are so concerned with depicting the media's concept of the freedom and spontaneity of childhood that we have forgotten the children themselves. Tousled hair, dirty faces and toothless grins may be thought of as "natural" and "appealing" by adults, but this opinion is not necessarily shared by the children being photographed. Very few adults would be willing to be pictured with their front teeth missing.

As a teacher/photography student influenced by years of media conditioning, I have many such photographs of children in classrooms in "natural" play situations and of my eight year-old daughter, Sara. Intending to choose a variety of prints of my daughter for submission to an exhibition, I asked her to help me select her favourites. I was discouraged to find she disliked most of them and felt she looked "horrid and ugly" and was quite horrified at the thought of anyone else seeing them.

I told her I would re-photograph her if she would dress up as she would like to be seen by others, giving her complete freedom of the dressing-up box and our clothes cupboards. The accompanying photographs, with poses quite unprompted by me, resulted.

This notion of how children see themselves and how others should see them is considerably influenced by television. The recent Bullock Report, *A Language for Life*, states that children between the ages of 15 and 14 spent almost as much time in front of a television set as at school.

When we were children, my friends and I simply wished to look like fairy story princesses or ballerinas, but I am faced by my eight year-old daughter who apparently sees herself as a model in miniature from one of the glossy magazines. By our nod of approval, grimace, grin or complete indifference, we can influence the world of children's imagination and their play. What effect the camera?

Aware that for many children their involvement ends at the click of the shutter, I let Sara help me develop the film in our kitchen and print her favourites that she had selected from a contact sheet. Her involvement was carried right through to the final stage when some of the prints were sepia toned and the hair was hand painted by her.

She was highly amused by a print of herself with no clothers on, but on no account would she let anyone else see it, until I suggested hand painting flowers and leaves across the photograph. She was quite agreeable about this and insisted they should cover the "rude bits."

Even photographers who believe in photographing children in a free and natural situation may manipulate, deliberately or unknowingly, or wait until the situation appears natural as they see it. The end product, the apparently spontaneous photograph may not be as natural or free from influence as it appears at first glance.

Half Moon Photography Workshop

NEW PREMISES

As this issue goes to print, we have received confirmation that our proposed workshop premises at 15 Half Moon Passage, London E.1 can now be occupied. This means that our plans to provide larger exhibition space, a number of individual darkrooms, a teaching and communal darkroom, finishing room, photo reference library, picture and slide archive, A.T. construction workshop, seminar room and cafe meeting place can now be realised.

The task of converting the premises will begin at once. All offers of help will be welcome.

EXHIBITIONS

Our current exhibition is **Circus Travelling** by **Laurence Migdale**, third year student at Polytechnic of Central London.

Future program this year will include exhibitions by **Tony Bock, Robert Golden, Richard Greenhill** and **Larry Herman.**

TOURING EXHIBITIONS

The Half Moon Photography Workshop offers the following exhibitions for touring:

Tees-Side Industrial Communities by Derek Smith

Cathall Road Estate by Gregory Hale

Doing Photography by Blackfriars Young Photography Group

Men photographed by women

The Orkney Islands by Chick Chalmers

Women: Who are We? by Claire Schwob

Contact us for availability and cost of hiring.

WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS

We are currently organising a series of workshops, seminars and courses to begin in the autumn. For example, as a follow-up to our 'Kids and Photography' seminar, we have planned an initial three practical events which will be:

1. **Materials Workshop** – an introduction to equipment and materials available, cost, availability and general resources.

2. **An Ideas Workshop** – to pool and discuss ongoing work in a variety of areas.

3. **Alternatives** – to give ideas how to use photography towards kids becoming more autonomous, self-reliant and creative and to help towards group work and an appreciation of photography.

Further details will be announced at a later date. Our current, 6-page general information and program leaflet is available at 20p including postage from us.

'CAMERA OBSCURED?' VIDEO TAPES

Edited tapes from the first three 'Camera Obscured? ' seminars held at the Half Moon last year are now available for hire.

1. **Young British Photographers**

2. **Photography on the Curriculum**

3. **The Task of the Photojournalist**

These tapes last 40 minures each and have been made on Sony half-inch 'high density' standard. Copies can be made on other standards by request.

If you would like to hire a tape, or would like more information, please contact us.

CAMERAWORK (ISSN 0308 1672) is designed to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, views and information on photography and other forms of communication. By exploring the application, scope and content of photography, we intend to demystify the process. We see this as part of the struggle to learn, to describe and to share experiences and so contribute to the process by which we grow in capacity and power to control our own lives.

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If you have any comments to make or articles, letters or prints you would like to contribute, we will be glad to hear from you. Please make sure it reaches us by 21st August 1976.

Foundation subscription to the Workshop includes six issues of CAMERAWORK, posters for monthly exhibitions, plus invitations to all openings. The cost of this is only £3.80 per year (students £2.80).

JOIN THE WORKSHOP

I wish to become a Founder subscriber to H.M.P.W. for one year and enclose £3.80.

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Note: STUDENTS: Please show CAMERAWORK to friends, tutors, fellow students – and most especially – to the Librarian at your college. Suggest that they subscribe towards our pioneering work in British photography.

The HMPW acknowledges the financial assistance of the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Greater London Arts Association

What does possession mean to you?

7% of our population
own 84% of our wealth

The Economist, 15 January, 1966

Poster by Victor Burgin